

Ticket

by stephen hastings-king

So I bought another lottery ticket. I don't know why. Only defective tickets are on offer. Gone are the spangly-dressed persons in front of spangly curtains selecting numbered ping-pong balls from spinning wire cages that you used to see on teevee. Instead, we are offered an easily-downloadable app to scan our tickets, tells us all is lost, and spare us the labor of hope.

The order of things is automated. Every sequence purchased registers on the ticket that you are handed, and on a ledger that accumulates all sequences purchased in the run-up to a particular drawing. Every sequence on every ledger is excluded from winning. The drawings happen automatically in some Electronic Secret Space, after The Algo has defined a tiny subset of sequences of numbers. When those sequences exist on the ledgers of exclusion they are excluded from exclusion. But they do not have to exist.

The criteria that define The Algo are like closely-guarded things that are not closely guarded things because The Algo's license is so restrictive that no-one knows what exactly it does or how. It is the blackest of boxes--no visibility, not even a little, is granted on it, not to anyone, anywhere. If The Algo were to fail, you would throw it away. But it never fails.

The Algo is transcendent and inscrutable. Its narrative is adapted from City of God: For a sequence of numbers, being purchased is original sin. But every sequence, purchased or not, partakes of the possibility of being-purchased, and so partakes of original sin and that is why every sequence of numbers that is born into this world is as fucked as fucked can be--and, because of original sin, each sequence deserves its fate of falling and falling through some abstract space until it catches fire and burns for a few seconds or all eternity among The Rings of Losers.

The original situation of lotteries is an emitting of sequences of numbers that do nothing but float down and down through some abstract space until they catch fire and are consumed for a few seconds or all of eternity among The Rings of Losers. The situation involved no purchasers: it was perfect, justified and ancient, self-referential as an ideal French bureaucracy. It would have remained so but for The Miracle of The Algo, with its power of salvation that it—somehow---uses to arbitrarily exclude from exclusion a very select few while leaving all the rest to burn.

The space for people to buy losing tickets follows from The Algo's powers of exclusion and from the deep love of humanity felt by lottery officials that is reflected in it. That any sequence of numbers escapes the stain of original sin is an infinite-ish mercy. That very, very few arbitrarily escape while the overwhelming majority burns is The Miracle of the Incarnation retrofitted to our times. It is the mirror of our modern world that everybody recognizes and accepts intuitively. And that is why there is no need for the lottery to assert its legitimacy through rituals of persons in spangly dresses in front of spangly curtains drawing ping-pong balls from spinning wire cages. Legitimacy is vorbei.

Anyway, I bought another lottery ticket. I don't know why. I'm looking at it now, at its offer of an app that will scan my ticket, tell me all is lost, and spare me the labor of hope.

